



**Office of the Governor
South Carolina
Guardian ad Litem Program**

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<http://www.oepp.sc.gov/gal>

Alicia was abused by her stepfather.

She acts out at school.

She is sent to
live in a group
home.

She runs away
and drops
out of school.

ALICIA GOES
HOME TO
HER FATHER
AND FINISHES
SCHOOL.

**GAL VOLUNTEER
STEPS IN HERE.**

**BE THE DIFFERENCE.
VOLUNTEER.**

I'd like to become a GAL Volunteer.

- Start by contacting the GAL office for an application and information packet. Local program information can be found on the back of this brochure, or call this toll-free number: 1-800-277-0113.
- Return the completed application and signed consent forms to the GAL office.
- Schedule an initial interview with the Program Coordinator before the next training session. You will receive further information about the program, and your volunteer training manual.
- Complete the 30 hour initial training sessions. These will include classroom and home work sessions, Court observation, and an introduction to the Department of Social Services.
- When your training is completed, and all reference checks have cleared, you will have a final interview with the Program Coordinator.
- Upon successfully completing all the requirements, you will be ready to make a difference for an abused or neglected child!



Alicia's Story



Alicia is like thousands of other children in South Carolina who are abused and neglected every year.

Alicia is 15 years old. She was abused by her stepfather. Alicia was placed in a group home when her mother was informed of the abuse but refused to believe Alicia.

If a trained volunteer is available, a Judge will appoint Alicia a Volunteer Guardian ad Litem to advocate for her in all Family Court hearings.

If you would like to be the person who speaks up for Alicia, read on to find out how you can become a trained Volunteer Guardian ad Litem.

Learning about Alicia

The first thing a Volunteer Guardian ad Litem (GAL) will do is get to know Alicia. The Guardian ad Litem wants to learn everything possible about Alicia so she can truly recommend what will be in her best interest.

The Guardian ad Litem will spend time talking to Alicia, learning about her likes and dislikes, her school, her friends, and most importantly, about her family. The Guardian ad Litem learns as much as he/she can about why Alicia is in foster care.

After speaking with Alicia, the Guardian ad Litem will speak to her teachers and counselors. Alicia's teacher tells the Guardian ad Litem that Alicia has fallen behind in school. She has become rebellious and has behavioral problems at school. She is facing expulsion from high school.

Alicia's mother tells the GAL that she does not believe Alicia, and does not want Alicia back in her home. She believes Alicia is just a difficult child, and is only acting out to get attention.

Alicia's father tells the GAL that he believes Alicia, and wants to support her. He has lost contact with her over the years, but would like to rebuild their relationship. He would like to see Alicia get back in school and get help with her problems.

Frequently Asked Questions:

Do I need a degree or a certain background to be a Guardian ad Litem?

No, any responsible adult with the desire and time to help an abused or neglected child can become a GAL. Sensitivity, dedication and common sense are more important qualities than educational background and work experience.

May I volunteer if I have a full time job?

Yes, many of our GAL's have full time careers, yet they have enough flexibility in their schedules to effectively advocate for children as well. You will need to have some flexibility in order to attend Family Court hearings about your children, but generally you can arrange other interviews and appointments according to your schedule.

There has been some confusion about private paid guardians. Are they part of the Guardian ad Litem program?

No, the private guardians are paid to investigate custody cases and are not court appointed to DSS abuse and neglect cases. Furthermore, we belong to the South Carolina Guardian ad Litem Program, a Division of the Governor's Office, and the private guardians do not. Our training does not qualify a person to become a private guardian.

I can't become a Guardian ad Litem at this time. Are there other ways I can help the program?

Yes, there are many ways you can help. These might include helping staff the office, or serving as a Board Member and assisting with fund raising and other special projects.

Guardian ad Litem Qualifications

- Be at least 21 years of age;
- Complete a Guardian *ad Litem* application;
- Successfully complete the initial 30 hour Guardian *ad Litem* Program pre-service training;
- Successfully complete a screening interview by the Program Coordinator;
- Successfully complete Family Court observations;
- Provide three positive character references;
- Have no criminal record;
- Have no history of abuse and neglect of a child;
- Sign and agree to abide by the Program's Volunteer Agreement; and
- Read and agree to abide by the Program's Volunteer Guidelines.



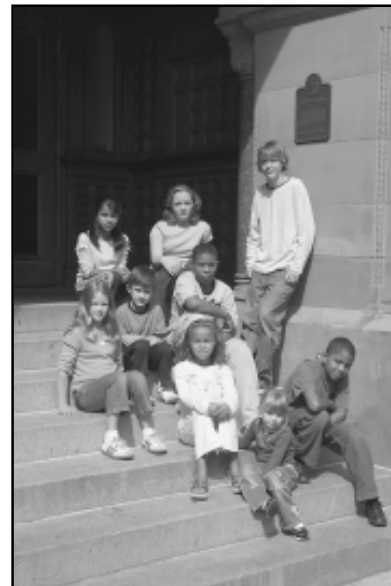
Reporting About Alicia

As Alicia's voice in Court, the GAL will make a written report to a Judge about the facts of the case that were learned in the investigation.

The GAL will make recommendations regarding Alicia, and will let the Judge know what Alicia wants and how she feels about returning to her family.

The GAL will help insure that Alicia gets the proper help with school, and see what special programs are available to prevent her expulsion and return her to a classroom where she can be successful.

The GAL assists in formulating plans with the Department of Social Services to insure that Alicia is in a safe, permanent home.



The GAL will report to the Judge her areas of concern: her mother's failure to protect Alicia, and Alicia's desire to be reunited with her father.

The GAL appears at all Court hearings on Alicia's behalf, so Alicia's voice can always be heard.

Monitoring Alicia

The GAL will remain Alicia's volunteer as long as her case is open. This can be anywhere from 6 months to 2 years.

If Alicia remains in foster care a long time, it's very important to have a GAL who has been with her from the beginning. The GAL explains to Alicia what is happening in Court, and what Alicia can expect.

Alicia will probably experience many changes in her life: different case workers, different foster parents, new schools and counselors and the GAL will remain the only constant thing in her life.

The GAL helps insure that Alicia is placed in a therapeutic setting to receive counseling for her victimization and the behavior problems that resulted. She follows Alicia's school progress and advocates for her to be readmitted to school when she is returned to her father's home.

The GAL also monitors the progress of the family. She checks to see if they are receiving counseling, and if they have completed all of the other services required of them to make a safe home for Alicia.



Advocating for Alicia

As Alicia's advocate, the Guardian ad Litem always works toward the best interest of the child: A safe home, a permanent home, as quickly as possible.

The Guardian ad Litem treats each child as unique, and works to see that her needs are being met.

In Alicia's case, the Guardian ad Litem would advocate for Alicia to be placed with her father once she has received the counseling she needs.

Depending on the progress of the parents and the effect it has on Alicia, the Guardian ad Litem will advocate regarding visitation and/or reunification.

Most importantly, the Guardian ad Litem advocates to keep the Family Court process moving, so that Alicia doesn't spend her life in limbo, never knowing if she will go home or not.

If Alicia's parents were unable or unwilling to make progress towards returning her home, then the Guardian ad Litem might advocate that their rights be terminated, so that Alicia can be adopted into a loving, permanent home.

Alicia's safety and health, as well as her desires, will always be considered by the Court if she has a volunteer Guardian ad Litem.

Mission Statement:

The South Carolina Guardian ad Litem Program recruits, trains and supervises volunteers who are court-appointed to represent and advocate for the best interests of children in family court proceedings involving allegations of abuse or neglect.



A member of the National CASA Association



“As a judge, I had to make tough decisions. I had to decide whether to take a child from the only home he’s ever known, or leave him someplace where he might possibly be abused. I needed someone who could tell me what was best for the child - from the child’s viewpoint. That’s what a court appointed Guardian ad Litem does.”

*David Soukup,
Founder of CASA/GAL*